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GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines leadership as the most critical problem of governance in Nigeria, by looking at, assessing and comparing the administrations between 1999 and 2014. The state of security and safety, and the provision of human capital (Education and health) in each government will be used as an assessment indicator. This paper uses few direct citations and evidence from other works/reports to support this research. The paper argues that poor leadership has impacted negatively on the state of security and safety as well as human capital development in Nigeria. The paper analyses that leaders under the civilian administrations despite been democratic, failed to meet the basic needs of the citizens. It concludes that since 1960, Nigeria has been bedevilled with bad governance due to blatant corruption, moral decadence and gross mismanagement of human capital and mineral resources.

Keywords: Leadership, Governance, Corruption, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the world's leading oil producers; it has a variety of mineral resources, the diversity of its vegetation and climate holds great potential for producing rich combination of agricultural products and, indeed, endowed human resources. Despite this potential, the country has not been particularly successful in using its resources for the general good and sustainable development. According to Human Development Index (HDI) 2012 report, Nigeria ranked 142nd below Mauritania, Congo, Cameroon, Togo, Kenya, Ghana, and obviously, South Africa and all of the North African countries, despite the fact that Nigeria generates a far greater income than many of these countries combined. However, of all \$500

billion plus in oil revenues and a \$2trillion economy were mostly mismanaged or stolen. And this falls squarely on the failure of leadership. (www.manofcontrasts.blogspot.com)

Governance on the other hand involves far more than the power of the state or the strength of political will. The rule of law, state of security and safety, provision of basic needs, human capital, and accountability are not merely technical questions of administrative procedure or institutional design. They are outcomes of democratizing processes driven by committed leadership, and also by the participation of and contention among groups and interests in society—processes that are most effective when sustained and managed by legitimate, and effective leaders.

It is instructive to note that no nation has achieved meaningful development, socially, politically or economically without the input of an effective leadership (Obasola, 2002:10).

In contemporary discourse, the concepts of leadership and governance have attracted wider interests as they serve as the pivot upon which social, political and economic structures rest. The numerous problems which have been bedevilling Nigeria today have been blamed on ineffective leadership. While it is true that there have been apparent leadership and governance crises in Nigeria, the last fifteen years have witnessed struggle to engender effective leadership and governance in Nigeria (Adejuwon, & Afegbua2012:141)

Since the return to civilian rule, Nigeria has being undergoing serious and deepening socio-political and economic crisis. These problems generated by mismanagement of human capital and mineral resources and the prevalence of insecurity, call our attention to the problem of leadership in the country. Similarly, the staggering waves of insecurity, blatant corruption coupled with moral decadence can be attributed to leadership problem.

It is imperative that, the quest for good leadership is a sine-qua-non for governance and sustainable development. It was recognized that Nigeria's failures have come about largely as a result of the leaders' insensitivity to the basic needs of the citizens. In other cases, bad governance, corruption, moral decadence had weakened the system of governance. (Adejuwon, & Afegbua ibid)

According to Gen Buhari (1998), there is manifestly the dearth of leadership everywhere in the world; not just political leadership but also spiritual, social, organizational, national and international. The situation has deteriorated so much that the world has to tolerate and accept poor substitutes, pontificating over the affairs of nations. The global social, economic and political crises were derived from lack of capable and visionary leadership that leads by precepts and with commitment to sacrifice and self-denial. Besides, good leadership eludes Nigeria for other such reasons as the differences or peculiarities of our political history, socio-cultural differences etc.

Poor leadership is the major challenge and source of Nigeria's predicament and socio-economic crises. Only a few leaders have voluntarily left office; most others were assassinated or were deposed by military coups. It is against this backdrop, that this study identifies leadership as a major variable to correctly historicize the nature, character and dimensions of the Nigeria problem.

Governance and Leadership: Conceptual Clarification.

The concept of "Governance" is not new. It has been around in both political and academic discourse for a long time, referring in a generic sense to the task of running a government or any other appropriate entity, for example a nation. More recently, it has gained particular significance in the literature on Africa's development. World Bank (1989) identified governance as one of the major challenges confronting Africa. More specifically, World Bank refers to such phenomena as the extensive personalization of power, the denial of fundamental human rights, widespread corruption, and the prevalence of unelected and unaccountable government.

The concept of governance, in fact, is simple. It is seen as a set of values, policies and institutions through which the society manages economic, political as well as social processes at different levels, on the basis of interaction among the government, civil society and private sector. (Sahni, 2003:1-2)

In essence, the concept of governance is probably as old as human civilization. It broadly means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. The concept of governance relates to the quality of relationship between the

government and citizens whom it serves and protects. Governance could be defined as one in which the concerned authority if any, exercises power, exerts influence and manages the country's social as well as economic resources leading to better development. In a more precise manner we can say that governance is the way those with power, use the power. Thus, governance has social, political, and economic dimensions. (Sahni, *ibid*)

Governance is defined as the capacity to establish and sustain workable relations between individual actors in order to promote collective goals (Chazan, 1992:122).

It was further defined by Galadima (1998:117) as;

a process of organizing and managing legitimate power structures, entrusted by the people, to provide law and order, protect fundamental human rights, ensure rule of law and due process of law, provide for the basic needs and welfare of the people and the pursuit of their happiness.

Ubegbe (1999:282) defines leadership in the following words;

Leadership is the process of creating the subordinates' identification with the group's mission and creating their desires to achieve the group's goal.

According to Mullins, (1996) leadership is a process in which the leaders and followers interact such that the leader influences the actions of the followers towards the achievement of certain aims or objectives. Thus it is the ability of influencing the behaviour of others, or exerts influence within working group in order to achieving group task or organisation objective. The followers (subordinates) perceive the leadership as having certain attributes or characteristics that endeared him/her to control or exert influence over them. Therefore, leadership, by concept, is a non-coercive capacity (i.e. is not the use of instrument of delegated power or authority), and followers (subordinate) willing consent to be influenced or directed by the leadership. Leadership is hence conferred from below (by the electorates/subordinates) and not from above (by elites/super ordinates) for constructive engagement towards cooperative, collaborative efforts and mutual benefits.

This paper defines leadership within the confines of politico-bureaucratic officialdom (i.e. all political office holders and public bureaucrats). Yusuf (2003:6) avers that Leadership involves strategically developing and implementing plans and policies with accountability and

transparency. Good leadership, which requires the ability to face challenges to achieve results in complex conditions, can and should be practiced at all levels.

Scholars have devised a number of models to guide the study of leadership. However, for the purpose of this study transformational leadership theory should be imbibed by Nigeria's political leaders.

Transformational leadership is one of the most popular leadership theories in recent years. In general, a hallmark of transformational leadership is the extent to which the leader influences, or transforms followers (Sashkin, 2004). Theories in this new paradigm of leadership centre on traits and behaviours of leaders, the situational context of leadership, and the relationships between and among leaders and followers in the context.

The Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria

The bane of Nigeria's problem has been the failure of political leadership. There are of course failures in other areas, but these are traceable to political leadership deficiencies, Seteolu (2004:74) summarizes the challenge from Nigerian perspective thus;

The political elites (Leaders) are not a productive class, but rely on the control of state structures to access economic rewards. The over politicization of the Nigerian state is also understood in the context of the unmediated struggle for power, influence and patronage. The nature of political contest ensured the emergence of a local governing class without ideological commitment. Rather than pursue political contests within ideological frameworks, politics became a contested terrain for shallow, self-centered political gains.

According to Adams Oshiomole, the subject of leadership reoccurrence in our national discourse suggests that the leadership question is still critical to Nigeria's quest for good governance and the consolidation of the democratic order. This is definitely to be expected in view of the widely held notion that the problem with development in Nigeria is mainly that of leadership. Now we have to answer the question, what has happened to leadership and where are the leaders? This question is germane because under a democracy, it is expected that the quality of governance will be much higher than it was under the military, and that the citizens will have the benefit of accountable and transparent leadership and that the resources of the country will be managed for development.

Leadership lack of transparency in public spending has resulted in massive looting of the national treasury; lack of accountability and gross mismanagement of public enterprises and institutions by leadership, has generated massive debts that have become a major drain on national resources. There is a growing global consensus on the devastating effect of corruption on development and good governance. There is an organic interconnection between quality of governance and capacity to drive a sustainable human and capital development. (Yusuf Hamza: 2003). According to Kofi Annan, 2003 (then Secretary General of United Nations), “Corruption is an insidious scourge that impoverishes many countries, and affects us all ... it creates discrimination between different groups in a society, feeds inequality and injustice, discourages foreign growth ... it is indeed a major obstacle to political stability and successful social and economic development of any nation”.

Nigeria, which is the largest country in the continent of Africa, has a dearth of genuine leaders. Available ones are tyrants who act against the interests of the people (Isekhure, 1995:141-142)..

Eze (1995:96) has this to say about leadership in Nigeria;

In considering the Nigerian situation, there seem to be certain issues in Nigerian leadership which require experimental investigations. For instance, it has been generally asserted that Nigeria's management are marked by authoritarian leadership characteristics and practices. They are said to have maintained a rigid dictatorial approach, as well as master-servant, rider-horse relationship with subordinates. In fact, it has been said that a Nigerian man is by nature and training an autocrat who demands nothing but respect and obedience from his subordinates, and those younger and lower in status than him. Also in public sector, the leadership have been associated with certain undesirable traits such as double- standards, pursuance of selfish goals, lack of seriousness and indiscipline.

Yusuf (2003:2) says poor leadership, especially in previous administrations has led to lack of government accountability and transparency that to a large extent, has resulted in the high level of corruption in the country. In the Corruption Perception Index 2013 published by Transparency International, Nigeria corruption level plunged further from 137th out of 177 countries surveyed in 2012 to 144th, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Report 2014 ranked it 127th out of 144 countries, Nigeria is still firmly one of the world's

poor destinations. The same report rated Nigeria the third worst country in the world in the corrupt diversion of public funds. Showing lack of faith in the integrity of public office holders - politico-bureaucracy (as they characterized and are instrument of corrupt practices), lack of effective popular participation in policy making (most political elites rigged themselves to power and hence becomes irresponsible to mass yearnings).

The effect of these are constraints to human and capital development; which include unemployment, high cost of living, inflation, poor infrastructure, pervasive poverty, high rate of insecurity and safety, moral decadence, gross mismanagement of mineral resources among several others.

This shows that leaders and those around the corridors of power in Nigeria have simply privatized the state for their selfish interests. Indeed, respected, visionary leaders that are of proven integrity are needed to steer the ship of the country; such leaders must be people oriented.

Adeola (2007:107) argues further that;

The history of great nations have been linked to visionary and purposeful leadership, be it in the advanced industrialized countries or developing nations. Such leaders have played significant roles in the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their countries China, Brazil, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and tiny Botswana were once trapped in underdevelopment, and their leaders understood the imperatives of massive investment in infrastructure, education and health programmes, they sorted out leadership and governance problem to meet global standards that attracted the crucial level of local and Foreign Direct Investment that took them to the top.

However, it is right to argue that poor leadership is not merely capable of threatening the very existence of the nation, but has actually threatened and, is still threatening the very existence of the nation. Poor leadership at different magnitudes have made the various governments in Nigeria unable and incapable of addressing the nation's problems, particularly the provision of the basic needs of the citizens. This has impacted negatively on poverty, peace (in the form of conflicts and crime), security, safety and development in the country.

NEEDS scholars and theorists argue that when leaders and states are not transparent and unaccountable, they fail to address important issues with basic needs that violence brews.

However, in Nigeria, the leaders were unable to provide for the masses because they succumbed to political corruption. This subsequently impacted on poverty, peace and development of the nation. The institutionalization of corruption by Nigeria's political leaders has eroded institutional capacity of government, thereby rendering it ineffective and weak.

Nigeria leadership has failed to harness the resources and the ingenuity of the people for national development. The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character or political system in operation. The character of political leadership became a problem as most of them lost or lacked control of effective leadership. This led to the scramble and partition of state resources to suit their purpose.

An Assessment of Leadership Performance between 1999 and 2014

In order to have a clear picture or understanding of governance and the challenges of leadership in Nigeria, the paper will assess and compare leadership performances between 1999 and 2014 in Nigeria.

Nigeria, the "Giant of Africa", became independent in 1960. Out of 54 years of independence, the country has been under civilian rule for about 25 years, while the military ruled for 29 years at different intervals.

Records show the civilian leaders in Nigeria were implicated in the looting syndrome of her external loans, though at different levels. In this respect, AFRODAD cited Patricia Adams, an authority on odious debt that Nigeria with about \$30 billion in debt may top all countries for corruption and it is also Africa's most indebted nation. The successive political leaders under civilian administrations were blamed for governing the country corruptly.

This paper is based on the realities about the state of safety and security, moral decadence, gross mismanagement of human and capital development in Nigeria. The main argument of the paper will be the negative impact of poor leadership in Nigeria.

President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007)

This government pursued economic reforms that uphold transparency, public accountability and good governance; for example the establishment of Anti-corrupt agencies: Economic and

Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). Yet, some attitudes of President Obasanjo, and some projects he embarked upon indicates that he was not free from corruption. Examples of serious ‘indications’ that suggest President Obasanjo as probably corrupt during his tenure was: The Library Launch at Abeokuta, Ogun State Nigeria that is the Obasanjo Presidential Library (OPL) project. It can be argued that in the said launching, Obasanjo used his position as President to extort billions of naira from the rich and powerful Nigerians.

On his part World Nobel Laureate in 1986, Professor Wole Soyinka, on May16, 2005, at Ibadan, described the launch thus:

What happened in Abeokuta was an executive extortion. The fact that Obasanjo and even his deputy, Atiku Abubakar obtained licences to run private universities in Nigeria is questionable. The Code of Conduct Bureau was expected to explain (and should have explained) to the Nigerian masses the rationality in the then serving President embarking upon private projects while still in office. Besides, almost all the states’ governors during Obasanjo’s tenure were equally corrupt, particularly the 30 governors that supported Obasanjo’s third term in office bid.

Good and weighty evidence of poor leadership is the case of Chief Joshua Chibi Dariye, the embattled governor of Plateau State, who was arrested in London on Sept 2nd 2004 for money laundering. (The Nation: 2007)

Like Dariye, the case of Alamiyeseigha, the Bayelsa state governor that was arrested for the same alleged money laundering is still on records. (www.proshareng.com)

Most of these state governors are still facing the wrath of the EFCC since they left office .One major resultant effect of the indication of political corruption in Obasanjo’s government is the high level of poverty.

In 1998, the World Economic Forum (based in Germany) rated Nigeria 22nd out of 23 African countries in the order of competitiveness for foreign aid. Of the five factors cited as

the culprit, corruption was the star of the pack. Indeed, the other factors - poor infrastructure, lack of clear direction in market-oriented economy, political instability - owe their potency to the escalating effect of corruption. The figure was above 70 percent when he left office in 2007 (FOS).

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) making recommendation for cancellation of Nigeria's debt notes; "Over 70 percent of Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day, 79,500 Nigerian children die before age 5 every month, less than 60 percent of Primary-aged children attend school..."

And this high level of poverty during Obasanjo's regime, led to protracted and intense conflicts (e.g. the Niger-Delta, Ijaw and Aguleri conflicts) and a rise in the level of crime (high way robbers and rise in vigilantism).

In an editorial on Monday 16 May 2005, The Guardian could not hide its disgust: The library launch has been described elsewhere as executive extortion. What has happened is perhaps more serious than that. It can be described as constructive corruption where the construction is subtle, disarming and palpable negative.... Knowing the Nigerian mindset you cannot involve functionaries of government and its agencies and tell the world that all their donations are coming from their salaries and private enterprise.

President Umaru Yar' Adua (2007-2010)

With the advent of the Yar' Adua Administration in 2007, the Federal Government articulated the 7-point Agenda for national development. The policy thrust revolved around the seven-point contract of that Administration with the Nigerian people: Energy, Education, Agriculture, Infrastructure, Wealth Creation and Poverty Alleviation, Land Reforms, and Security. The point was further made, that these reforms would catapult Nigeria to the rank of one of the 20 most developed countries of the world by the year 2020.(Nihotour:2014)

Thus, it seems that the NEEDS provided the common denominator upon which the 7-point Agenda, the Vision 20 2020, and the Transformation Agenda rest. But sadly, after more than fifty years of policy reforms,

Nigeria has painfully remained: A nation with very weak private sector and tottering national currency that was the whipping boy of the international financial community.

-- Life expectancy in Nigeria according to international estimates is 46 years; (UNICEF, 2005).

-- Over 70% of Nigerian citizens live below the poverty line (International benchmark is \$1.5 per day), and Nigeria is ranked 156th out of 187 countries in the world ranking of nations using the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2011).

-- Nigeria's Human Development Index at 0.459 lags behind the Sub-Saharan Africa average of 0.463 and the world average of 0.682. (HDI, 2011);

--- Other HDI for Nigeria include: Life expectancy 51.9 years; Education index 0.442; Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index 0.310; and Gross National Income per capita 2,069. Current statistics reveal that 1% of Nigeria's population; enjoy the privileges of 80% of its oil wealth. Thus, 99% of the population have barely 20% of the overall wealth to struggle over. (Yusuf, 2012).

-- Nigeria is ranked 14th as the world's most failed state in the 2011 rankings released by Fund for Peace, an American independent non-profit research and educational organisation (HDI, 2012).

--Nigeria's position dropped sharply from 54th in 2005, to 22nd in 2006, and 14th in 2010 and 2011 (HDI, 2012).

-- The anti-corruption group, Transparency International has consistently ranked Nigeria among countries most riddled with corruption. It described Nigeria as a Gangster's Paradise where

"...you pay a bribe to see a key official in many an establishment. You pay a bribe to get a job. You pay a bribe to get the passport that is yours by birthright. If you do not give or collect bribes, you remain poor and an object of scorn despite your several degrees and cognate experience until Providence intervenes for you" (TI, 1998).

Given this sad and inglorious profile, how does Nigeria break out of the logjam of underdevelopment? How can the country resolve the fundamental problems of: insecurity and safety to meet the basic needs of the citizens. It is glaring that, the NEEDS reforms have left much to be desired; Dode (2010:7) contends that the Yar'Adua Administration lacked the political and administrative will to implement the seven-point agenda; while Gyong (2012:106) sees it as a major challenge to the success of the Transformation Agenda of the President the near absence of a purposeful, trusted, respected and focused leadership in Nigeria.

President (Dr) Good luck Ebele Jonathan (2010 - 2014)

On April 16, 2011, President Good luck Ebele Jonathan won a pan-Nigerian mandate that swept through the North and South of Nigeria. He promised to radically transform the nation and overhaul every aspect of the national life. The Transformation Agenda Final Report defines the goal of the reform exercise in these words: that

the policies and programmes directed at addressing governance will focus on the public service, security, law and order, the legislature, anti-corruption measures and institutions, the judiciary, economic coordination, and support for private investment... These will be addressed through the implementation of the recommendations ... in the areas of public service reforms, judicial reform, anti-corruption initiative, electoral reform, land use reform, fiscal management reforms, power sector reform, police reform, financial sector reform, infra-structural development reform, and information and communication technology (p. 51; Cited by Asobia, 2012).

However, according to the National secretary of the APC. Alhaji Lai Mohammed, Nigerians need no marking scheme to know that the rate of unemployment rose to an unprecedented 23.9 percent by December 2011, according to figures given by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Today the figure must be hovering above the 50 percent mark.. The so called 6.5 percent economic growth announced by the Finance Minister is meaningful only on paper. Fifty four percent of Nigerian youths were unemployed in 2012. This was contained in the “2012 National Baseline Youth Survey Report” issued in Abuja by the NBS in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Youth Development. It said out of 45,836 youths recorded against different types of crimes, 42,072, representing 75.5 percent were males, while the remaining 24.5 percent were females.

The Special Assistant on Sustainable Banking, CBN, Dr Aisha Mahmood, disclosed that unemployment remains a severe threat to Nigeria’s economy. She said as the population is growing the resources that we all depend on, the food, energy and water, are declining. In a recently published data on its website , the National Bureau of Statistics showed that states that have a poverty rate of 70 percent include Katsina, 74.5 percent, Adamawa, 74.2 percent, Gombe, 74.2 percent ,Jigawa, 74.1 percent , Plateau 74.1 percent, Ebonyi 73.6 percent, *Bauchi* 73 percent ,Kebbi 72 percent and Zamfara, 70.8 respectively.

Let it also be highlighted that in the course of this study, academics in publicly owned universities in Nigeria were on strike for seven months running; and the institutions remained unopened.

On this score, it is instructive to note that out of the 123 (one hundred and twenty three) universities in Nigeria, 73 (seventy three) are publicly owned - made up of 36 (thirty six) federal universities and 37 (thirty seven) state universities (United States Embassy in Nigeria, 2012).

The nation's human capital development is in total neglect, while, governance in Nigeria has only given birth to what Joseph and Gillies (2010:185) pinpoint as politics without progress and Kuka (2012:1) describes as the political class treating Nigerian politics as national bazaar.

The President's falsehood that poverty had been reduced by 50 per cent is selective amnesia. With the Central Bank of Nigeria's assessment that 80 per cent of youths are unemployed, a World Bank report asserting that 58 million Nigerians are poor and the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Report 2014 ranking it 127th out of 144 countries. Nigeria is still firmly one of the world's poor destinations. We cannot maximise our potential until we effectively tackle insecurity, corruption, and re-empower human capital for effective performance. Nigeria has been rated one of the worst governed countries in Africa based on the 2014 Ibrahim Index of African Governance [IIAG], which was released on Monday. Under participation and human rights, the country is rated 26th with 46.9 per cent, 31th on sustainable economic opportunity with 43.3 per cent and 34th in human development with 53.0 per cent.

The country got its lowest rating in personal safety where it is ranked 49th with 16.5 per cent and second lowest in national security where it is ranked 48th with 58.2 per cent.

In the report, obtained by PREMIUM TIMES, Nigeria is rated 45.8 per cent lower than the African average (51.5 per cent) and ranked 37th out of 52 in the overall governance scale.

Indeed, in December 2013, ex-President Obasanjo, generally known to have been responsible for Jonathan's ascendancy to Nigeria's presidency, in an 18-page publicly circulated letter, addressed to President Jonathan, accused the President as a person, of being deficit in purposeful, trustworthy, respectable and focused leadership credentials. Chief Obasanjo, in highly acerbic tones, accused President Jonathan of being bereft of democratic tendencies and credentials.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper on governance and the challenges of leadership in Nigeria has argued that of all the problems militating against Nigeria's quest for socio-politico economic development, the most daunting appear to be ineffective leadership.

The paper has examined the concepts of leadership and governance in all their ramifications. The paper also examined the leadership and governance of three administrations in Nigeria between 1999 and 2014 and the enigmatic nature of corruption in Nigeria, the paper focused attention on the state of security and safety, and the provision of human capital (education and health) as barometers of good governance.

The paper suggests the following recommendations to tackle the problems of ineffective leadership, the menace of corruption and the evil effects of bad governance.

First and foremost, we need a paradigm shift in leadership identification, nurturing and selection - something new and something different. We need to throw up political platforms and candidates with the knowledge, skills and proven record of performance and integrity in public service to transform our nation. (Nasir El-Rufai)

It is my humble view that we should scrutinize all those that offer themselves for leadership bearing in mind at least the following parameters:

Education, Experience and Pedigree are necessary but not sufficient

We must not write off educational attainment as a necessary indicator of leadership effectiveness. Experience that is relevant to governance – in managing resources, administering large, complex organizations, and mobilizing our nation's diversity into inclusive strength matters. The educational background and family heritage can check the attitude of our aspiring leaders.

Bold and Courageous Leaders with Clear Vision

Transformational leaders are bold and courageous. They envision and see possibilities in impossibilities and persuade the followers that it is not only possible but attainable, outlining practical steps to realize the vision.

Bridging Regional and Ethno- Religious Divide

Nigeria's diversity, history and recent experiences require leaders that build bridges across our genders, ethnic groups, regions and religions. No one should be appointed/elected base on favouritism and family connection to national leadership unless by expressions, actions and practices that have shown this capacity not to discriminate, but to unite, integrate and include every Nigerian of whatever background in his inner circle, comfortably. Careful scrutiny of the track records of any prospective leader in his or her past public and private life would show how diversely they recruited their staff, picked advisers and made decisions on citing of projects and programs. This principle can be applied to aspirants even seeking office at state and local government levels in a careful and discerning manner.

Recognition for the Imbalance in our Federalism

Nigeria's federal structure exists only in the official name of our nation. Years of administrative centralization by the military has created distortions and imbalances in our federalism. This needs to be recognized by our prospective leaders. We must raise this debate on federal imbalance to put on hold the senseless quest for the creation of more states, demand the legislation of State and Federal crimes and cause the amendment of our Constitution to enable States and Local Governments establish community-level security agencies to address our disparate internal security needs. We must encourage inter-state competition by devolving more powers and responsibilities to lower tiers of government and reducing the scope and scale of Federal encroachment into the daily lives of our citizens.

Strong, Dedicated Advisers and Inner Circle

There is a Nigerian proverb which translated is "there is no wicked ruler without wicked advisers". Effective leaders usually have a team of advisers that are brighter, more experienced and exposed. Self-confident leaders identify their personal skills and experience gap and choose staff to furnish what is missing. A leader, however brilliant, who is surrounded by an inner circle of insecure, incompetent and mediocre people, often comes to grief. It is therefore advised that leaders should appoint technocrat who are competent in their various field. This will also ease the burden of governance.

Public Service Skills and Performance

Public service experience particularly at Federal level is essential for effective future public leadership at that level. Similarly, any person aspiring to leadership at state or local government level ought to show some understanding of, experience in and exposure to that level of governance. Private sector success helps but is not a conclusive indicator of future public sector performance. In any case, there is a huge difference between the skill sets required for politics and governance because often persons that get a government elected are not the best persons to help it govern.

Democrats in Words, Actions and Practice

It is one thing for aspiring leaders to talk repeatedly about democracy, but another to practice it. We should scrutinize our leaders' words, actions and practices to ensure that there are no disconnects between all three. People driven by the politics of personal interest and primitive accumulation do not believe in democracy nor are they capable of practicing it in governance. They neither believe in social justice and equal opportunity for citizens. By nature, they are capricious and seek to exercise power singularly for private accumulation, not for general welfare, service and public good. They therefore have no regard for people capable of independent thought, merit and performance, so they inadvertently put blind loyalty above the Constitution.

Nigerians need to offer suitable challenges, recognition, and support to prospective leaders, as well as minimizing the barriers for sustained leadership development. One thing is certain, the leadership factor is significantly more important than ever before and needs to be on the strategic agenda of Nigeria. It is my sincere hope that these modest recommendations will help us all in responding to the challenges of leadership by taking the country to its next level.

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